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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AND CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF COUNSELORS.

BY- WHETSTONE, B.D.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COUNSELOR'S PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS AND CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUNSELOR'S TRAINING, BACKGROUND, AND PRESENT ENVIRONMENT WAS STUDIED. THE SUBJECTS WERE 42 COUNSELORS, SELECTED AT RANDOM, REPRESENTING A CROSS-SECTION OF FULL AND PART-TIME COUNSELORS IN ALABAMA HIGH SCHOOLS. AN 84 ITEM IDEAL STUDENT Q-SORT, DESIGNED TO REVEAL WHETHER A COUNSELOR PERCEIVES STUDENTS AS FLEXIBLE OR RIGID IN THEIR INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, AND A CHECKLIST OF 50 COUNSELOR ASSIGNMENTS WERE USED TO GATHER DATA. THE CHI SQUARE TECHNIQUE WAS USED TO TEST SIGNIFICANCE, AND THE COEFFICIENT OF CORRELATION WAS USED TO DETERMINE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUNSELOR PERCEPTIONS AND PRESENT DUTIES. EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO COUNSELING SEEM TO HAVE A GREATER EFFECT ON THE COUNSELOR'S PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS THAN DOES HIS ENVIRONMENT, THE AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT IN COUNSELING, OR OTHER DUTIES PERFORMED. THIS STUDY SUGGESTS THAT THE MORE EFFECTIVE COUNSELOR SHOULD BE A FORMER TEACHER, SHOULD HAVE ATTENDED AN NDEA GUIDANCE INSTITUTE, WOULD PROFIT BY PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP, AND SHOULD HAVE ADDITIONAL GRADUATE WORK. (AO)

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The Relationship Between Counselors' Perceptions of Students And Certain Characteristics of Counselors

B. D. Whetstone
Assistant Professor of Education
Birmingham-Southern College
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

It has long been a problem of counselor training to isolate those characteristics of individuals who choose counseling as a career which tend to predict effectiveness as a counselor. Some studies (Soper and Combs, 1962; Stewart, 1957; Whetstone, 1965) indicate that an important variable related to counselor effectiveness is the counselor's perception of the students whom he wishes to help. The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between the counselor's perception of students and certain characteristics of the counselor's training, background, and present environment.

Forty-two counselors representing a cross-section of full and part-time counselors in Alabama high schools were selected at random as subjects in this study. Two instruments were constructed to gather data — an eighty-four item Ideal Student Description Q-Sort and a duty checklist. The Q-Sort, composed of descriptions of students, is designed to reveal whether a counselor perceives students as being flexible or rigid in their interpersonal relationships. The flexibility-rigidity scale was derived from Rogers' (1961) process-stasis continuum. A Q-Sort positive score indicates flexibility and a negative score, rigidity. A score of zero renders that Q-Sort neutral. The checklist consists of 50 possible duty assignments of high school counselors. Twenty duties are positive, twenty negative, and ten neutral, depending on whether the duty conflicts

CG 000 111

with the role of a counselor as judged by a panel of counselor educators, (see Appendix I).

The variable which were compared with the counselors' perceptions and showing no significant relationship are:

1. Professional Association Membership
2. Time spent in counseling (full or part-time)
3. Number of years counseling experience
4. Level of professional training
5. Present duties performed

There is some indication that significant differences might be found in the areas of Professional Association Membership and level of professional training in subsequent studies with more subjects. The trend is apparent in this study, but the small number of subjects in the subcategories limits statistical inferences.

There is also an indication that counselors who perceive students as being more rigid than flexible perform more negative duties than those counselors who perceive students as being flexible. The former group of counselors also seems to perform fewer positive duties than the latter. Counselors who are responsible for resolving schedule conflicts, supervising lunchrooms, dealing with truancy, and substituting for absent teachers seemed to perceive students as being rigid, while those who counseled with students, supervised homeroom guidance programs, and planned group orientation seemed to perceive students as being flexible. Although these differences are not significant, the trend indicates a need for further study in this area.

A recent survey of counselors in a metropolitan school district (Lasson, 1966) indicates that counselors who perceive students as being

flexible, according to the I.S.D. Q-Sort, also differ from their "rigid" colleagues in their general attitudes and interests. An attitude scale also revealed that the group of "flexible" counselors differed from the "rigid" counselors on two of six scales, Independence and Conformity.

In the present study, significant differences were found between counselors' perceptions of students and:

1. Number of counselors who participated in an N.D.E.A. Guidance Institute, and
2. The type of vocational experience the counselors had prior to being assigned counseling responsibilities.

The Chi Square technique was used to test significance except in analyzing the duties of counselors. The Coefficient of Correlation was used to determine the relationship of counselors' perceptions and present duties.

Table 1 shows the number of subjects who had positive or negative Q-Sort scores as compared with the other variables in the study.

This study seems to indicate that certain experiences a counselor has prior to assuming a position in a high school have a closer relationship to his perception of students than the environment in which he works. The amount of time spent in counseling and other duties performed by the counselor seem to have less effect on the counselor's perception of students than the counselor's previous professional experience and Institute participation. The over-all trend indicated in this study suggests that the more effective counselor should be a former teacher, rather than a school administrator or coach; should have attended an N.D.E.A. Guidance Institute; and would profit by professional association membership and additional graduate work. These indications seem to be true when counselor effectiveness is defined in terms of the counselor's perception of students.

TABLE I

A COMPARISON OF Q-SORT SCORES WITH CERTAIN OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUNSELORS' BACKGROUNDS AND PRESENT CONDITIONS

		Q-Sort Scores Positive	Negative	Significance
Professional Ass'n participation	APGA[1] & AGA[2]	6	3	
	APGA or AGA	7	13	n.s.
	Neither	0	3	
Time assigned to counseling	Full time	9	9	n.s.
	Part time	11	3	
NDEA Guidance Inst. participation	Yes	8	7	X^2=.05
	No	3	14	
Counseling experience	0-4 years	6	10	n.s.
	over 4 years	7	9	
Level of professional training	Bachelors	1	7	
	Masters	10	8	n.s.
	Post-Masters	4	2	
Type of previous professional experience	Classroom teacher	11	11	X^2=.01
	Principal or coach	0	10	
Present assignment of duties	No.of negative duties 0-3	10	10	
	4-6	2	5	r=.19
	7-10	1	4	
	No. of positive duties 9-12	0	4	
	13-16	9	8	r=.31
	17-20	5	6	

[1]American Personnel and Guidance Association

[2]Alabama Guidance Association (Not affiliated with APGA at the time of this study)

APPENDIX I

Positive, Negative, and Neutral Duties of Counselors as Judged by a Panel of Counselor Educators

Positive duties — consistent with the counselor's role

I counsel with students about personal problems.
I plan orientation of new students.
I administer standardized testing programs.
I counsel with students about educational plans.
I administer individual tests of intelligence.
I counsel with students about vocational plans.
I plan College Day programs.
I counsel with parents and students together.
I plan Career Day and related career programs.
I conduct "test information" sessions with teachers.
I conduct case conferences with teachers.
I explain test results to students in small or large groups.
I write letters of recommendation for scholarships and jobs.
I supervise recording of test data done by assistants.
I maintain an occupational information file or library.
I identify students who are underachieving.
I maintain an educational information library or file.
I lead the search for causes for student misbehavior.
I supervise homeroom guidance programs.
I keep cumulative records up to date.

Neutral duties — may be expected of any staff member, a "housekeeping" task

I teach a class in personal adjustment, psychology, or family living.
I have the responsibility of a session room, or homeroom.
I plan scheduling of freshmen and new students.
I record test data on permanent records.
I orient new faculty members.
I serve as chairman of a faculty committee other than guidance.
I issue report cards at the first of the year to teachers.
I supervise job placement of drop-outs and terminal graduates.
I maintain a file of information about alumni.
I review all report cards for possible problems.

Negative duties — detrimental to the counselor's role

I teach one or more academic subjects (other than personal adjustment).
I write passes to class for tardy students.
I substitute for absent teachers.
I handle disciplinary problems.
I tutor certain students in weak subject areas.
I suspend or expel students who break regulations.
I supervise most class scheduling.
I supervise certain lunchroom periods.
I deal with most, or all, truancy problems.
I keep a regular study hall.
I review most excuses for absences sent by parents.
I coach or supervise a co-curricular activity after school.
I act as principal-counselor combined (or vice-principal-counselor).
I enroll transfer students.
I sponsor the senior class, annual, or student newspaper.
I am responsible for visual aids and audio-visual equipment.
I am an officer of the P.T.A.
I handle most schedule changes or class conflicts.
I supervise students at basketball games, dances, etc.
I plan or conduct faculty meetings.

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